

The Architectural League

A Brilliant Exhibition At the Metropolitan

By Royal Cortissoz

To enter the exhibition of the Architectural League in the new unfinished south wing of the Metropolitan Museum is to feel for a moment as if one were entering the Grand Palais. There is the same spacious atmosphere, the same air as of things presented on a truly monumental scale. A work of sculpture has plenty of elbow room, and the presence of greenery enhances its effect. Decorative exhibits are given every possible advantage, yet fall into a proper relation to the whole, not dominating as on so many previous occasions. The League has never before given greater range to all the arts, and at the same time it has now contrived to keep architecture in the foreground. Here, at last, is assuredly a demonstration that a big exhibition space may be successfully exploited in New York; and by good luck the League strengthens the argument by the only legitimate process, by filling its galleries with good material. The unusual opportunity offered by the Museum has proved a genuine inspiration. Rubbish has been kept out. A high average is steadily maintained. It is as though the various committees, fired by the chance to build up a handsome ensemble, had taken special pains to look after details. We have alluded to the famous gallery used for the Salon in Paris. There are good grounds for the assertion that it would be hard put to it, in any similar organization of contemporary architecture and the allied arts, to rival the display just opened in Central Park.

American Building

How It Has Resumed Its Stride After the War

The first impression received from this exhibition is one of unexpected vitality, unexpected because, as everybody knows, the building operations of the country suffered a severe setback during the war. Plans necessarily abandoned when we entered the conflict had to reckon, after the armistice, with prodigiously increased costs of labor and materials. In the annals of this period the cheerfulness of our architects ought not to be forgotten. They "carried on" with magnificent courage while their profession faced profound discouragements. There is another point that should be kept in mind. A good many bonds were loosened by the war. Any number of painters turned to the so-called "modernist" hypothesis. American architecture has stood firm. A careful survey of the examples here exhibited develops practically no signs of deviation from the old standards. The sole exception to the prevailing stability of the school is provided, curiously, by Mr. B. G. Goodhue. He has not turned his back on the Gothic inspiration out of which he has so often done such noble things. In the romantic structure he has projected as a convocation and office building for Protestant centralized religious activities he has bodied forth a really beautiful conception, a gigantic shaft or tower which envelops the idea of the skyscraper in a Gothic garment. His imagination functions to impressive purpose in this building. His scheme for the State Capitol of Nebraska tells an altogether different story. Here, too, he rears a great shaft up into the blue, above a spreading flat, fortress-like base. On paper it might be fleetingly plausible, as a piece of theatrical scene painting. As architecture it is nondescript in style, with a strong infusion of German ugliness. We can imagine a Berlin professor of "new" tendencies cooking up this repellent design. From an architect of Mr. Goodhue's known dedication to beauty it is merely puzzling.

Monumental architecture in this country always has been and probably always will be largely a matter of scholarship. A designer with the strong idiosyncratic gifts of an H. H. Richardson is rare anywhere. But if learning, knowledge of the historical styles, is important in this branch of the art, good taste is an equally significant element. It counts all over the field, in the bungalow as well as in the bank building, but it never seems more precious than when it is governing the erection of some towering edifice in stone or brick. The problem all along has been to adapt the steel cage principle to aesthetic ends, to fuse business convenience and an equitable distribution of light with an atmosphere of art. There is an odd retrospective wing in this exhibition, odd because it is quite arbitrary in its selection of types. McComb's designs for our old City Hall, some of Richard Upjohn's churches, works by the late Richard M. Hunt and divers other things are shown. There is good and bad stuff in the mass. But the department is not well enough organized to clarify periods in American architecture. It includes, for example, John Russell Pope's superb Temple of the Scottish Rite, at Washington. That is a recent building. Why show it in a retrospective section? We note this section in passing, with an eye to the point in our chronology which the exhibition really emphasizes. The past might more usefully have been drawn upon for a "Chamber of Horrors." That would have heightened appreciation of the present status of the monumental building. It is scholarly, as we have said, and it is, we may also repeat, in good taste. There is no better lesson enforced by the League's exhibition.

Nobody could pretend that all the skyscrapers are perfect, or, for that matter, interesting. Some of them are to be congratulated on nothing more than their escape from vulgarity. But this is perhaps a boon not to be despised, and there is no lack of work which commands much warmer praise. We may cite, in illustration, Mr. B. W.

Morris's Cunard Building. It is heroic in scale and appropriately heroic in quality, a building of good proportions and of a positively consoling simplicity. One must always sympathize with the architect tackling a problem of this kind, one of a kind of endless fenestration. How is he to extort anything like design from the practical requirements imposed upon him? Mr. Morris manages through his use of arches and orders in his lower stages, through the repetition of orders near the roof, and through the recession of part of his facade. In the result his huge mass is held together without falling upon dullness. His building is representative of much that appears in the exhibition, of a disciplined, thoughtful ingenuity out of which flow dignified compositions. The difficulty that seems to gravel nearly all the architects is the difficulty of coming to a stop, of securing a roof line as good as the parceling out of window space beneath it. Cornices, pediments, cupolas and the like are evidently refractory motives and the roof itself has occasionally a hard time getting the right pitch.

American church architecture is being affected more than ever, we should say, by the play of Gothic ideas, and not unprofitably, either, though a temperament as rich and fruitful as Mr. Goodhue's is not perceptible among his



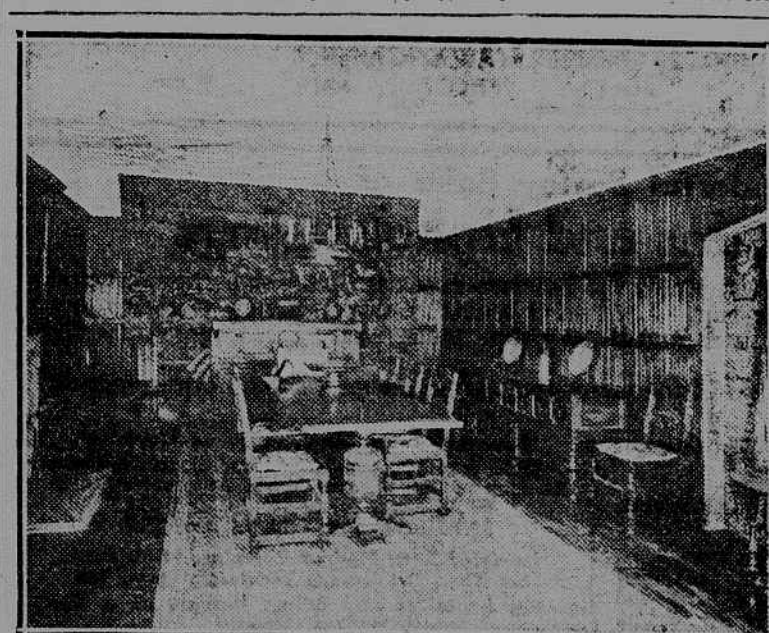
"DRAMA"
Panel for the Stanford White Memorial Doors
(From the sculpture by A. A. Weinman in the League exhibition)

rivals. The old Colonial standard is coming back to a certain extent. There are several designs in the show which revive the serene charm of the early New England or Southern meeting house, welcome sacrifices to the shade



HOUSE AND GARDENS AT OCEANIC
(From the design by A. C. Jackson in the League exhibition)

of Sir Christopher. But it is in the field of the dwelling house, both in city and country, that peculiarly in the country, that our school is plainly thriving most decisively. There are fewer Italianized designs shown this year than in some previous exhibitions. The English half-timbered tradition gives a number of the architects their point of



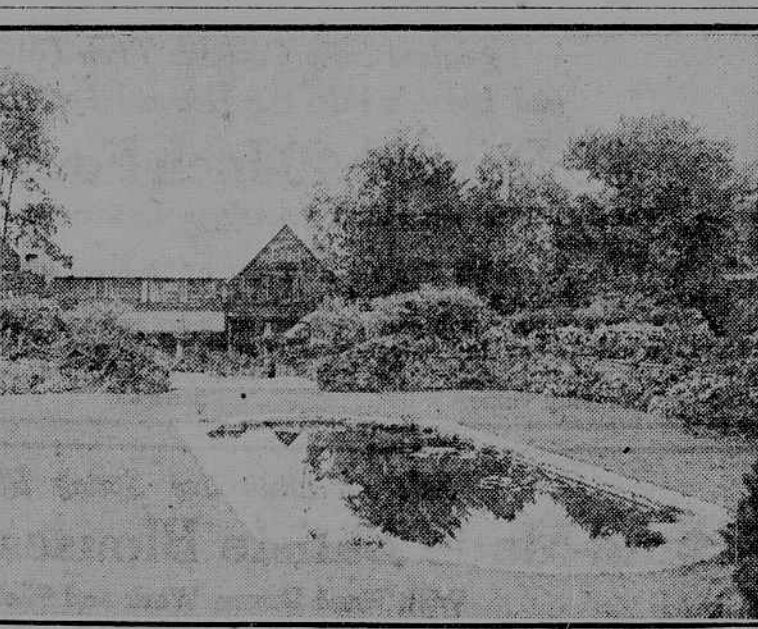
OLD ENGLISH ROOM
(From the design by the Kensington Manufacturing Company in the League exhibition)

departure, and we suspect that some of them have been mulling over French farmhouses, not neglecting their enchanting roofs. A salient development is the collaboration of the architect and the landscape architect, the production of schemes in which lawns and gardens are altogether of as much importance as the house. There are scores of admirable illustrations in the show,

and it is interesting to note, by the way, that some of the best designs are by women, such as those of Ruth Dean, Beatrix Farrand and Marian Coffin. Italian influences are obvious in much of the landscape gardening, but there is to be observed in even greater force the activity of ideas which avoid exotic suggestions in the environment of an American house. If there is one merit more than another which marks the general drift of the domestic architecture here it is one of a more racy, more intimate conception of the character and needs of this country. It is only in the interiors that an alien atmosphere persists. But that, we suppose, is inevitable, so long as the glamour of antique furniture, tapestries and so on continues to appeal to the collector. He, or she, can at any rate maintain that it promotes the decoration of a room in a very beautiful manner. It expresses nothing of American life, to be sure, beyond our eclecticism in matters of luxury, but who can deny its charm? And then, from time to time, some of our architects and interior decorators have the judgment to revert to the Colonial style, which, if "historical" too, is at all events a little nearer to us than Spanish or Italian Renaissance.

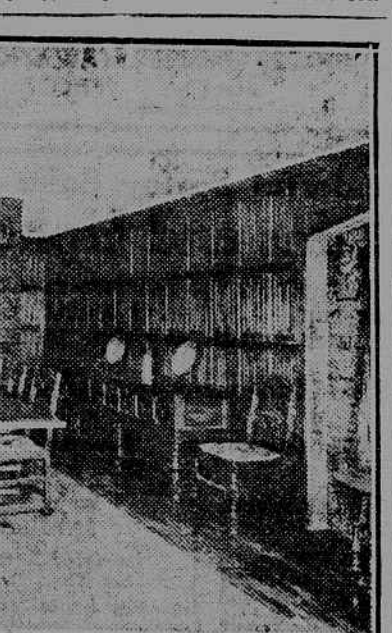
Decoration The Reconstructor, the Craftsman and the Painter

A feature of this exhibition is the



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presentation of the arts and crafts in more or less finished units of design. It has been done at the League before, but with more space this year it has been possible to make the nature of current decoration even more vividly apparent. The old English room shown by the Kensington Manufacturing Company, complete even to the plaster ceiling,



OLD ENGLISH ROOM
(From the design by the Kensington Manufacturing Company in the League exhibition)

ing, is typical of the thoroughgoing method employed. The series of such chambers on the lower of the two floors occupied at the museum constitutes a serviceable object lesson. If

Random Impressions in Current Exhibitions will be found on page six.



TRITON
(From the roundel by Ezra Winter in the League exhibition)

the sculptor of the decorative fountain at Claymont, which in spite of its great scale has charm; as the sculptor of a picturesque Lewis and Clarke group for Charlottesville, and lastly as the sculptor of a spirited equestrian monument to Stonewall Jackson. He is a good workman, and in all these productions he evinces ability in characterization. There are, of course, numerous war memorial groups, reliefs and single figures by Robert Aitken, A. A. Weinman and others. They are not among the more convincing things in the show. Mr. Aitken's two soldiers do well enough as making a piece of what might be called "topical" sculpture. But they are not realized with anything like the interest of design, the energy and the largeness which he discloses in his equestrian monument and its subordinate figures, the "George Rogers Clark." Neither of Mr. Weinman's war memorials has the grace or the spontaneous rounded charm of his panels for the Stanford White doors.

Mr. Herbert Adams sends two panels for the Stanford White doors, winning in composition and in line, and his "Nymph" is the most beautiful of all the nudes brought forward. The fascination of this bronze lies both in its contours, which are not too melting, but have a certain youthful hardness and vigor, and in its imaginative freshness. The trouble with so many contemporary studies from the nude is that one is very like another. This one denotes individuality. The conception of form is new and interesting. There are sculptures by Albert Jaeger, F. Lynn Jenkins, A. Stirling Calder, John Gregory, Malvina Hoffman, Evelyn Longman, Batchelder, Brenda Putnam and others which invite friendly comment. Plastic art de-

(Continued on next page.)

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EXHIBITION of SCULPTURE by ARTHUR LEE WILDENSTEIN GALLERIES 647 Fifth Avenue

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On View To-morrow and Tuesday FROM 9 A. M. TO 6 P. M. At the Galleries of Fifth Ave. Auction Rooms 333-341 Fourth Ave., Cor. 25th Street Desirable Furnishings and Effects Louis XV., Louis XVI., Italian and Colonial Furniture Upholstered Davenport, Odd Chairs, Secretaries, Bookcases, Wicker Settees and Chairs. UPRIGHT PLAYER PIANO, MAHOGANY CASE Dresden, Crown, Derby, Royal Worcester, Limoges and other Porcelains, Bronzes, beautiful Electroliers, Clock Sets, Bohemian Glass, Candelabra. Tiffany & Co. Solid Silver, Sheffield Plate, Oil Paintings, Engravings, Oriental Rugs, Etc. To be Sold Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, April 13, 14, 15, 16, from 2 o'clock each day. Wallace H. Day, Auctioneer

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PORTRAITS and PAINTINGS by Truman E. Fassett April 12 to 26 **FOLSOM GALLERIES** 104 West 57th Street

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